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Fair Trade



Chapter 1 by SaintSayaka

It's interesting, owning a pawn shop that specializes in human lives. You'd think that we'd only get the suicidal fodder - and we do, servicing them quickly and painlessly, make no mistake. But unique cases like her own never cease to amaze me.

She stands in front of me, not thirteen years old, but with a face far beyond her time. Her eyes sweep over my nametag for the fifth time - Orquidea, an eclectic name for an eclectic business - and finally find their place on my face.

"My name is Droplet Smith," she breathes, "and I want to know how much I'll get for my life."

Chapter 2 by R



It's not her age that surprises me, or her name. There are so many odd names these days, and so many children - some even younger than her - seeking death.

No. I can see it in her eyes. She doesn't want to die, but she thinks it's the only way.

"Do you have any medical files?" I ask, standard procedure. She does not. They never do.

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There's a pause, as she considers leaving and trying to pay someone for that. No, she wouldn't have the resources.

Her name is Droplet Smith, and I can tell from her eyes and the way she dresses and the way she walks that the only thing that's wrong with her is the fact that she's poor as dirt.

Someone, maybe a family member, maybe a friend, needs money to save their life. Nothing left, and there are very few ways for someone to get money. If I was a more moral person, I might turn her away, might tell her that her life has value over a handful of cash.

"Rough estimate, for a girl your age -" She's not the first person so young to come in here and she won't be the last - "Around 40,000 dollars, more depending on height, weight, and how healthy you are. Less if you have any diseases."

It's not as much as she thought.

No,

But it's enough for the treatment. It's enough for her to give her life over to me. I can see it in her eyes.

She looks at me with stone cold resignation.

"Deal."

Chapter 3 by mystery soldier



That one word gets me every time. Another life has been bought, another life is going to disappear. Truth be told, it isn't very enjoyable working here. Having to see innocent lives bought and killed isn't nice at all.

I look down at my table and scan the surface, looking for the paper work she's got to fill. It was on the right corner of the table, the booklet's brown cover being its only way of identification

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I filled out whatever I had to fill out, then I took the paper work and turned the booklet over to her.

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"If there is something you don't understand, please feel free to ask," I said monotonously. This is it. We're closing the deal. She's officially going to let us kill her. She picked up my pen and started filling in the form. She just stayed silent and filled the form with her details, no questions asked.

"You must really care for this person if you're willing to give up your life," I said, picking up the form and reading the details after she handed it to me.

"How would you know?" she asked, her voice just as monotone as mine. I put the booklet down.

"I've worked here for five years," I started. "Many people come here with that similar look in their eyes with that exact reason to give up their lives. A majority of customers I've dealt with are like that."

She stayed silent after I said that and let me read whatever she'd written down:

Name : Droplet Smith

Age : 13

Reason for death: Medical treatment for family member

I stopped reading after that and reached for the stamp on my table and pressed it against the paper.

"Thank you for coming," I said, following the script the company prepared for me. "We'll make your death as pleasant as we can."

And what haunted me most was the look in her big grey eyes. That horrified look I've become so accustomed to.

Chapter 4 by R



I wondered if she had done this of her own choice, or if someone had made her. I wasn't required to ask, as long as she signed and seemed to be of sound mind. The laws had degraded so much. Morality and legality hardly aligned.

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It's been a hard decision to write this story, but I hope you enjoyed it.

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"This is your final chance to back out of this." I tell the girl. I shouldn't, but I do. "Your death will be very quick and painless: you'll take a drink of this and it will be like falling asleep. Do you have any questions?"

I waited. The girl was far too young, and she looked far too innocent.

"I - this is destiny. My death tag said that I'd die, sleeping, a service. This is that, right?"

Death tags. They weren't illegal, but they always came across as something ridiculous, something bordering on cult-like. Always vague, yet always true.

"Maybe, maybe not." I told the girl. "It's your destiny. Do you think that this is a service?"

"Yes." Droplet said, and then, "No." Pause. "I don't know. It, it'll pay for two or three treatments."

What was that expensive, fifteen or twenty thousand dollars for a single dosage? I knew the answer instantly. The plague treatment.

"I - who is it? Your mother?" I asked, and I could see the tears starting to form in her eyes. No. Oh no. I did not need the crying child.

"It - it's the only way. She's going to die and I - I'm worthless, I know it, I just-" Steeled reserve melts away in to tears. I can't do this. I can't kill a crying child. Just - just no.

"This isn't the only way, uh, Droplet." I say, moving to place my hand on her shoulder but stopping half way. "There's other things you can do for money, and think of your mother. How she would feel surviving without you."

I know as soon as the words have left my mouth that I have lost a customer, but I can't seem to care.

Chapter 5 by Catkin Meow



This will be the fifth chapter of their story and the last chapter I will be allowed to publish here.

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I don't even think what I'm doing is good enough for me to publish anything! But I still

could do better though.

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I was never yes. They seemed to approach the process from the bottom up to the top and help,

And suddenly I knew what I could do. I had a private trust fund I was saving just in case I caught the plague. But the plague is caused by bird droppings. Don't get many inside a shop.

"Tell you what, sweetheart. Don't take your life. I'll give you some money for the first treatment. And until she gets better. But don't try and take advantage of me. I'll know. And I'll have to take your life to repay the debt. Best I can do for you." I say.

"Why?" she asks. "Don't try to pull anything weird. Or else."

"I'm just trying to help. Don't bite my head off," I try reassuring her.

Suddenly, a knife flickers in her hand. "Oh, don't bother. You really thought I would kill myself? Offer my own life for her? But, I think I'll take that money you offered as payment for you letting my sister die.

"You're the one who caused her downward spiral. I recognize your name. She loved you, did you know that? Why did you let her sacrifice herself for you? You could even have recovered without treatment, but she had to save you. And my mother died of a broken heart," said Droplet, a fake name likely.

"Celena," I croak.

The girl lunges toward me and presses just in the right place, so I crumple into a heap, like a used tissue.

Chapter 6 by Catkin Meow



I wake up in a room. My feet are shackled to a flimsy wooden chair. My limbs strain and stretch. Chafed and sore, my ankles scream as do my wrists. And then the girl appears, getting in my face. "You are going to pay. For what you did to me. To us." Us? What did that mean? And then the girl darts forward, a sharp grin glinting on her pale face. "All that you have wronged are coming for you, Orquidea Cena." Her features could have been pretty, deep set brown eyes in a

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"My name is Calista. Oops, now you know the name of a criminal. Guess I gotta kill you," she flippantly muttered.

Chapter 7 by Catkin Meow



And then an army of orphans appears. "You killed them. You took them. So we could live. We don't want YOU to live any more either.

Don't kill me, my heart screamed. Don't kill me, my brain screamed. Don't kill me, my body screamed. "Kill me, because I killed your sister," screams my mouth.

"So, you finally admit it, you rat."

"I begged her not to do it."

"You made her fall in love with her."

"You're insane. I loved her."

"She was just a tool."

"Did you see how the shop closes on the day of her deaths for repairs or something stupid like that?"

"Deaths?"

"Umm.... Mispoke." She couldn't know about this. She would twist the power I had over life into an army.

And then Drop! - no, Calista's - knife hovers over my throat.

"Tell me, or you're gonna find my sister for me!"

I meet her gaze coolly. "No." Even death is better than what awaits if she finds out.

I have to run away!

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And then I flip out of my chair and run across the floor, my back against my dark wall.

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Chapter 8 by R



Celena's younger siblings gather around to stare at the dead body of Orquidea Cena. I lie in the back room, adjusting to new limbs. This body is young, too young, but it will slip through the streets unnoticed.

Orquidea's body had had the plague, once, and had lost a limb and fingers spare to the disease before Celena had given everything for her, again, and again, and again.

This body has none of the well placed mental blocks I'd used in Orquidea. Celena's face stares back at me in transferred memories, and I can't shut it out. What's worse is that even in nightmares she never looks angry. That despite the fact her sacrifice was pointless, she would have done it a thousand times over.

I hate her, some times.

But in the one and spare years she has been dead, dead for me, I have yet to stop loving her.

I slip out the back door in the new body, and look at the chip implanted. Melodis. It is a pretty enough name, but more importantly than that it is a real one. Identity theft is nigh impossible now, with the chips, but it is simple fare if you can steal bodies as well.

I will not return to that shop again. I suppose that is for the best, because too much negative emotion wound up there tightly, memories of Celena's face as she walked in the door a thousand times, but mostly that last time played on repeat.

Calista will never forgive me, nor will any of those children who called Celena their sister, by blood or not. I didn't forgive myself either. She shouldn't have loved me. I shouldn't have loved her.

I sit on the train and head out of the city with a bag of quick supplies and all the money I could gather out of the back room. I place new mental blocks in the new mind of this body, and slowly all of that pain recedes back in to dullness.

Twice now I've had a deathbed. There are first days and then the body starts to move. The body you're about to leave behind.

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You know how many things you've done wrong in your life? You know how many things you've given to make things better?

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I knew that it would never be fair trade.

the end

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